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Eat Well And Look Up At The Stars: Deconstructing The Environmental Discourses Of A Residential Summer Camp's Canoe Trips Through Algonquin Park

Brandon Pludwinski
bjpludwinski@uwaterloo.ca

Bryan Grimwood
University of Waterloo, bgrimwood@uwaterloo.ca

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Eat Well and Look Up At The Stars: Deconstructing the Environmental Discourses of a Residential Summer Camp's Canoe Trips Through Algonquin Park

As a camper at a residential summer camp, I emulated everything my counsellors did, paying particular attention to their actions, language, and expressions. All of which, I later adopted as my own. My counsellors taught me how to think, act, and speak. 10 years later, I still use the same expressions and act in such a way that those I looked up to did. This anecdote alludes to a type of informal education that Ingold calls an “education of attention” (2000, p. 3). An education of attention refers to the informal learning process that occurs by attending to the actions of those around. In regards to a summer camp setting, as I am an example of, campers learn how to think, act, and speak from their counsellors.

The literature supports that camp counsellors are agents of socialization, responsible for teaching their campers how to think and act, whether or not they are aware of this (Mullins, 2014; Sharpe, 2005). By attending to the actions of the counsellors, the campers adopt various discourses and ideas that they pass onto their campers when they become staff members, resulting in community-based socially legitimized discourses (Bell, Instone, Mee, 2017; Ingold, 2000). One of the most dominant Western-based nature discourses is one that labels nature spaces as pristine wilderness areas that have existed outside of the human realm (Cronon, 1996). This discourse is commonly found in Algonquin Park (Baker, 2002). An issue with the pristine discourse is that it labels landscapes as areas where people have not, cannot, and will never be able to occupy, erasing the peoples’ existence from their traditional lands (Braun, 2002).

This academic presentation is based on a mobile qualitative masters thesis project titled “Eat Well and Look Up at the Stars: Deconstructing the Environmental Discourses of a Residential Summer Camp's Canoe Trips Through Algonquin Park”. The purpose of the research is to analyze how residential summer camp canoe trip counsellors enact their environmental ethic while leading trips through Algonquin Park. Using a postcolonial lens, the research aims to deconstruct how environmental ethics are commonly—both consciously and unconsciously—enacted by residential summer camp counsellors and embedded within broader and recurrent discourses that have normalized in a residential Jewish summer camp in Haliburton, Ontario.

Mobile methodologies seek to address the various social relations that are embedded within travel through the world (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Mobile methodologies position the researcher on a physical journey with the participants, allowing the researcher to focus on patterns and discourses found within travel (Mullins, 2014). It looks beyond the traditional ethnographic notion of the static research field site and views a physical journey that occurs between spaces as the research site. For this mobile research, the movement of the canoe trip going through the land becomes the field in which the research occurs.

This research draws upon three methods of data collection: participant observation, a participant journaling activity called the “commonplace journal” and semi-structured active interviews. Using participant observation, the researcher documents their initial impressions on the site, actions of the participants, direct quotations, and any events that occur, both expected and unexpected. Mullins (2014) proposes a participant

journaling exercise called the commonplace journal in which participants are asked to maintain a journal throughout a travel experience. Throughout the canoe trip, participants reflect upon their skills, places, and spaces the trip takes them, their relationships to people and nature, personal stories, and various newspaper clippings that have been purposely selected to encourage the participants to reflect on their use and presence within the park. The final method this research uses is semi-structured active interviews. The interviews are conversational nature and encourage a dialogue between the researcher and participant.

This inquiry uses a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to make sense of how various discourses are produced, normalized, and enacted by the camp counsellor's use of the park. Using the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis will allow me to uncover how the beneficiaries of settler colonialism assert their power by using and communicating the park in certain ways that continuously exclude and marginalize those that once occupied the land.

At the time of the presentation, the data collection process will be completed and the presentation will address the preliminary findings that relate to three themes of this year's conference: visitor experience design and measurement, product development, and communicating research with impact. This presentation will discuss the stories and meanings the participants attribute to their travel experiences and the strategies that the camp counsellors create for their campers to convey certain meanings of Algonquin Park. This presentation will also draw on the theme of communicating research with impact, as the methods being used in this research encourage the participants to reach a state of praxis, a form of critical reflection that leads to a desire to change one's practice (Evans & Jones, 2011; Mullins, 2014).

Algonquin Park was established in 1893, making it the oldest provincial park in Canada, and is just over 7,350 km². There are over 1,200 campsites that can be booked out by various individual, groups, tour companies, organizations, and summer camps. As a result, Algonquin Park has become a massive tourism hub that hosts over 830, 000 visitors a year (Ontario Parks, 2010). When we travel to places like Algonquin Park and engage in nature-based tourism, we adopt various ethics that guide us to act and think in certain ways that are conducive to maintaining the pristine emptiness found within natural landscapes. This ethic is learned and adopted by many who enter the park, campers included. Further normalizing and strengthening discourses that were built upon unjust systems.

This research and presentation are important to tourism academia and practitioners because it encourages a reconceptualization of the status quo of tourism spaces and experiences. By focusing on the role of camp counsellors on a canoe trip, camping organizations and the counsellors that guide various experiences will be able to understand the unannounced and unspoken legacies counsellors pass onto their campers. This research helps counsellors to critically interact with the legacies and the hidden meanings that their actions convey of a highly complicated and political tourist space. By deconstructing the environmental discourses of summer camp counsellors we can better understand the narratives the counsellors are telling their campers, providing the opportunity for counsellors and camping organizations to reflect on their actions, and potentially change for the better, *Propelling Smarter, Bolder Tourism*.

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